

# **A Comparison of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Missing Persons in British Columbia Where Foul Play has not been Ruled Out**



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## **Executive Summary**

The intent of the current study was to provide a descriptive analysis of uncleared missing person cases in British Columbia where foul play had not been ruled out and to examine differences in these cases between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal subjects. Of the 593 files identified as an uncleared missing person case in which foul play had not been ruled out, the earliest file was from 1949 and the most recent file was from 2007. In slightly more than two-thirds (69.0 per cent) of the files, the missing person was male, and in nearly three-quarters (72.2 per cent), the subject was Caucasian. The mean age of this sample of missing persons where foul play had not been ruled out was 34.6 years old. In this sample, 14.5% of the missing persons were identified as Aboriginal. Aboriginal people were overrepresented in this sample of missing persons where foul play had not been ruled out.

From the review of these cases, several important findings emerged. The majority of non-Aboriginal females and slightly more than three-quarters of Aboriginal females were working as prostitutes at the time of their disappearance. In fact, more than half of the females in this sample were prostitutes. The Aboriginals in this sample were more likely to be homeless or known to be living on the streets and were much more likely to have an addiction problem.

The Aboriginal missing persons in this sample were reported missing to the police after more than twice as much time had elapsed compared to non-Aboriginals. Aboriginal female prostitutes had the largest elapsed time between when they were last seen and when they were reported missing to the police. Alarming, the average amount of elapsed time was approximately 3½ years for Aboriginal female prostitutes. In effect, substantially more time elapsed before an Aboriginal person was reported missing compared to non-Aboriginals.

The most common probable cause of the missing person cases among Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals was a kidnapping; however, Aboriginals were much more likely to have this probable cause than non-Aboriginals. Perhaps because of this, cases involving an Aboriginal missing person were more likely to have an identified suspect, unless the subject was a prostitute.

It is critical to keep in mind that many of these differences were not related to the actions of the police. It would appear that the greatest contributions to Aboriginal missing person cases where foul play had not been ruled out and the case had not been cleared was the elapsed time before the missing person was reported missing to the police, the probable cause of the disappearance, and the missing person's lifestyle, especially working in the sex trade. This suggests that the public must be more vigilant in reporting missing persons to the police promptly, and the police need to develop better contacts and knowledge of with

those working in the sex trade workers so that, if a sex trade worker disappears in a situation where foul play cannot be ruled out are not simply missed, but the police are notified.

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## Introduction

In 2008, Irwin M. Cohen, Amanda McCormick, and Darryl Plecas completed a research project examining the nature and extent of uncleared missing persons cases in British Columbia.<sup>1</sup> That study examined 1,904 uncleared missing person cases from 1949 to 2008. This companion report examines only the 593 cases in which foul play had not been ruled out as a possibility in the missing person case.<sup>2</sup> In addition to a general review of these cases, this current report will pay particular attention to whether there were any differences between Aboriginal missing persons where foul play had not been ruled out and their non-Aboriginal counterparts and whether Aboriginals were overrepresented in this sample.

## Research Results

### General Demographic Information

As mentioned above, in total, 593 files were identified as an uncleared missing person case in which foul play had not been ruled out. The earliest file was from 1949 and the most recent file was from 2007. In slightly more than two-thirds (69.0 per cent) of the files, the missing person was male, and in nearly three-quarters (72.2 per cent), the subject was Caucasian. The mean age of this sample of missing persons where foul play had not been ruled out was 34.6 years old with three subjects being less than one year old and the oldest subject being 98 years old.

In this sample, 14.5% of the missing persons were identified as Aboriginal. There was a statistically significant difference with respect to gender when considering whether the missing person was Aboriginal. Specifically, while slightly more than one-quarter (28.1 per cent) of the Caucasian missing persons were female, nearly half of the Aboriginal missing persons (48.2 per cent) were female (see Figure 1).<sup>3</sup> There was not a statistically significant difference in mean age between Aboriginal missing persons (33.4 years old) and the non-Aboriginals in this sample (34.9 years old).

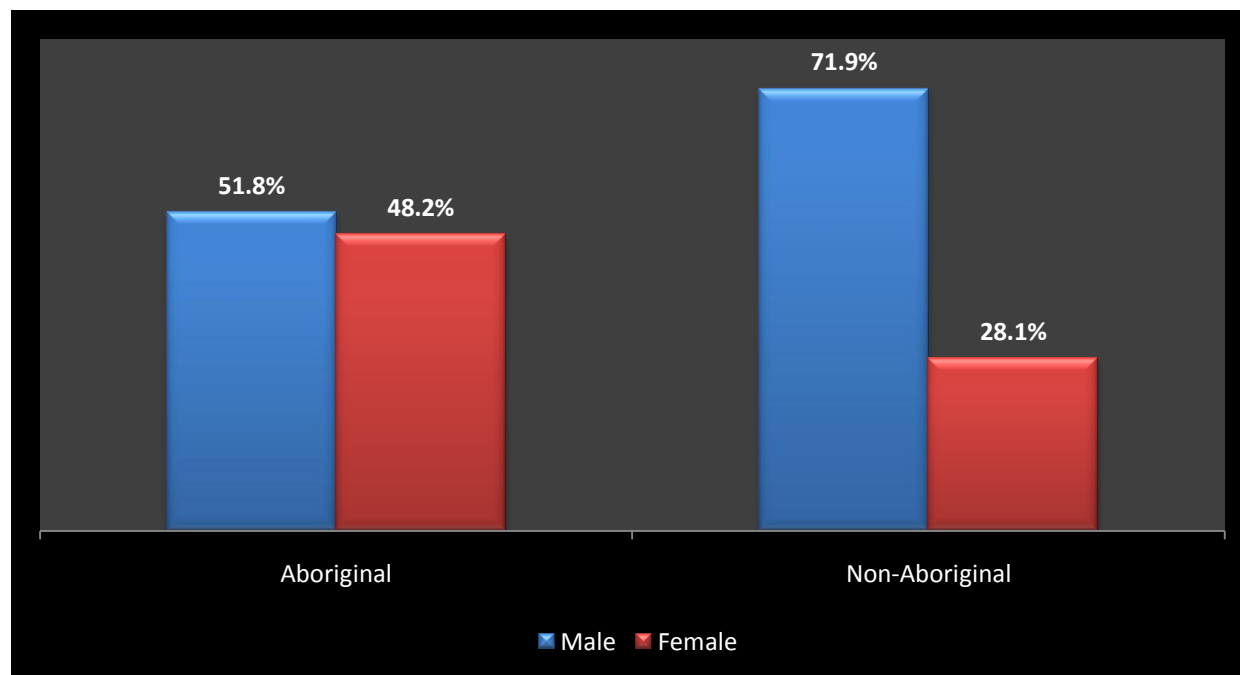
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<sup>1</sup> For the literature review on missing persons, the methodology used for these research projects, and the results of the analyses for the entire sample of 1,904 cases, please see Cohen, I.M., McCormick, A.V., & Plecas, D. (2008). A Review of the Nature and Extent of Uncleared Missing Persons Cases in British Columbia. Report for the RCMP "E" Division Major Crime Unit, British Columbia.

<sup>2</sup> The aforementioned original report should also be reviewed for a more detailed comparison between missing person cases where foul play had not been ruled out and cases where foul play had been ruled out.

<sup>3</sup>  $\chi^2 (1) = 13.73, p = .000$

Figure 1: Gender by Ethnicity



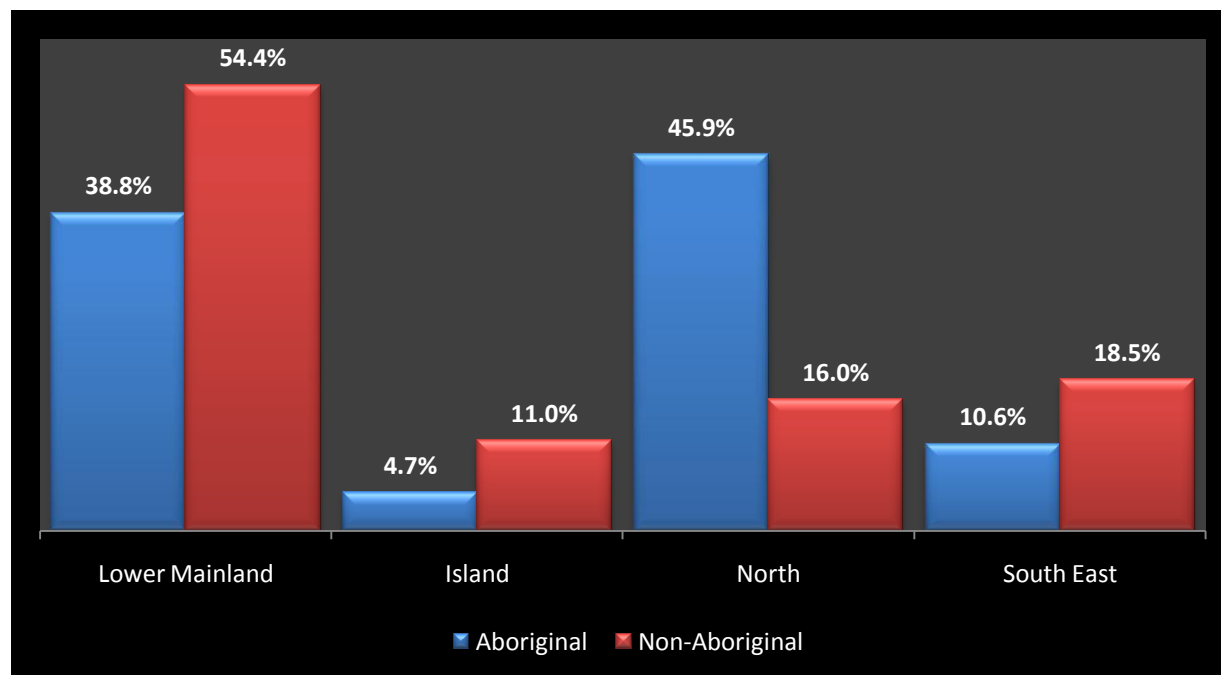
Interestingly, there was no statistically significant difference among the Aboriginal subjects in terms of mean age by gender. In other words, the mean age of both Aboriginal males and females in this sample was 33.5 years old; however, non-Aboriginal males were nearly five years older (36.2 years old) than their non-Aboriginal female counterparts (31.9 years old). The difference was not statistically significant.

In terms of the RCMP detachment districts where these people went missing, given the population distribution in British Columbia, it was not unexpected that the majority (52.2 per cent) of cases were from the Lower Mainland of Vancouver. Still, approximately one-fifth (20.3 per cent) of the missing person cases in this sample were from the North District followed by the South East District (17.4 per cent) and the Island District (10.1 per cent).

In considering the ethnicity of subjects and the case's primary district, it is important to note that nearly half (45.9 per cent) of the Aboriginal cases came from the North District compared to only 16.0% of the non-Aboriginal cases. In fact, nearly one-third (32.5 per cent) of all cases in the North district involved an Aboriginal person. Additionally, slightly more than one-third (38.8 per cent) of Aboriginal cases came from the Lower Mainland district compared to over half (54.4 per cent) of the non-Aboriginal cases (see Figure 2). In effect, Aboriginal subjects were underrepresented in the Lower Mainland, Island, and South East districts, but were overrepresented in the North District.



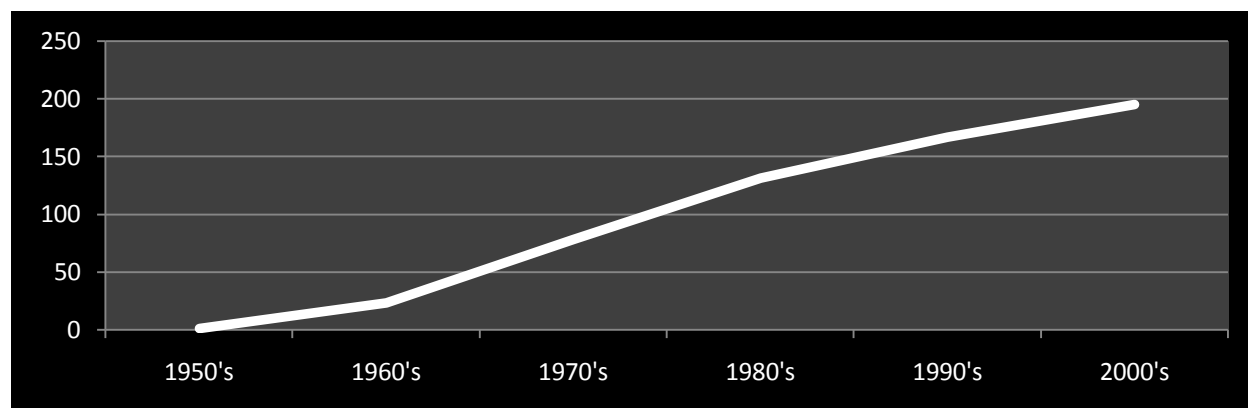
Figure 2: Distribution of Cases by District and Ethnicity



### General Distribution of Missing Person Cases

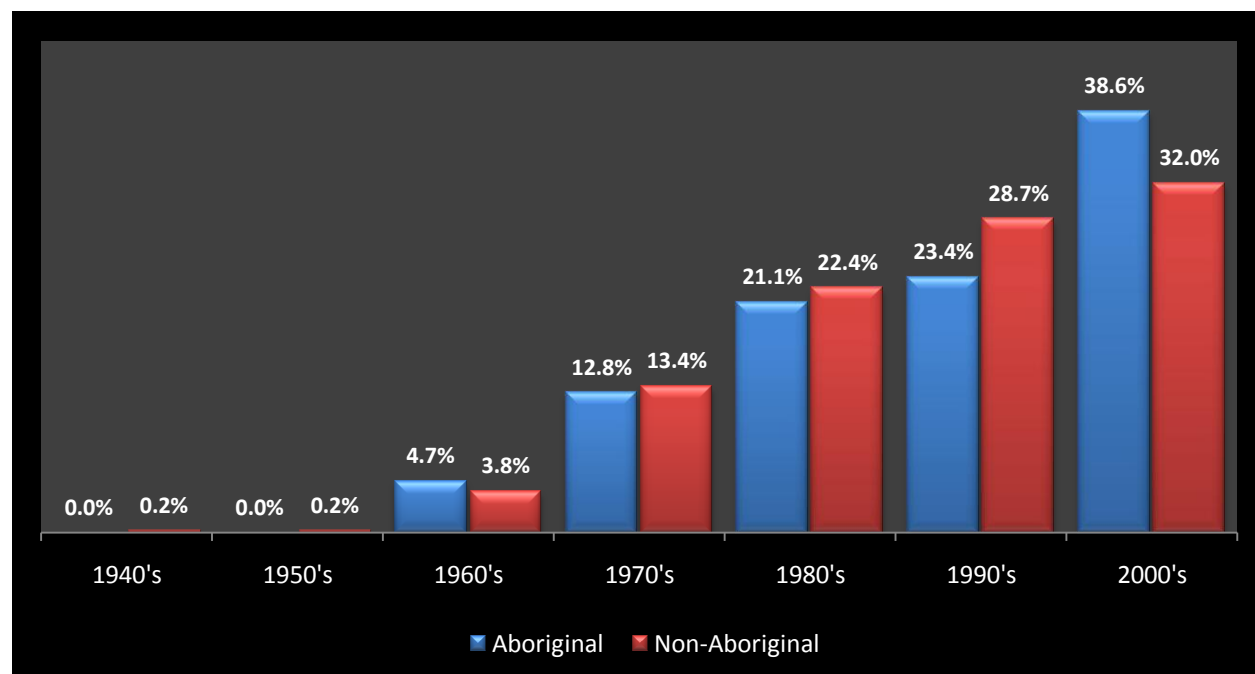
The raw number of missing person cases where foul play was suspected increased each decade from the 1950's to the 2000's. More specifically, while there was only one case from the 1950's, there were: 23 cases from the 1960's; 78 cases from the 1970's; 131 cases from the 1980's; 167 cases from the 1990's; and 195 missing person cases where foul play had not been ruled out from 2000 to 2008 (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Distribution of Cases by Decade



In terms of the distribution of cases by decade and ethnicity, as indicated in Figure 4, the proportion of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cases was generally similar. In effect, approximately one-third of Aboriginal cases (32.0 per cent) and non-Aboriginal cases (38.6 per cent) where foul play was not ruled out were from the 2000's.

Figure 4: Distribution of Cases by Decade and By Ethnicity



Slightly more than one-third of subjects (39.9 per cent) had a criminal record. Interestingly, while slightly more than one-third (37.6 per cent) of the non-Aboriginal subjects had a criminal record, a slight majority of Aboriginal subjects (53.6 per cent) had a criminal record. In terms of police contacts, slightly less than half of the entire sample (45.3 per cent) had at least one previous police contact. The nature of the police contact was overwhelmingly (75.6 per cent) a previous arrest and/or some violation that resulted in a ticket. The next most common was that the subject was a known drug user or trafficker (9.4 per cent).

There was a statistically significant difference on the issue of police contact between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal subjects. Specifically, while nearly two-thirds (65.1 per cent) of Aboriginal subjects had a police contact, a minority of non-Aboriginals (42.3 per cent) had a police contact.<sup>4</sup> Still, the most common reason for the police contact was a

<sup>4</sup>  $\chi^2 (1) = 7.85, p = .005$

previous arrest or a violation that resulted in a ticket for both Aboriginal (69.7 per cent) and non-Aboriginal (76.9 per cent) subjects.

While a small proportion of the sample was attending school at the time of their disappearance (18.6 per cent), a much larger proportion was employed (71.0 per cent). While the proportion of Aboriginal (18.2 per cent) and non-Aboriginal (18.7 per cent) who were attending school at the time of their disappearance was nearly identical, there was a non-statistically significant difference in the proportion of Aboriginal (59.3 per cent) and non-Aboriginal (72.9 per cent) subjects who were employed at the time of their disappearance. This difference was primarily between Aboriginal males (51.9 per cent) and non-Aboriginal males (71.3 per cent).

One form of employment that places people at a high risk for being a victim of crime or becoming a missing person is the sex trade. In this sample of missing persons where foul play has not been ruled out, nearly one-quarter (22.4 per cent) or 51 missing persons were known to be prostitutes at the time of their disappearance. Critically, when considering the nature of work by gender, the majority of non-Aboriginal females (53.1 per cent) and slightly more than three-quarters of the Aboriginal females (77.8 per cent) were working as prostitutes. In effect, more than half (58.5 per cent) of all the females who were employed at the time of their disappearance where foul play has not been ruled out were prostitutes. For males, the most common jobs were laborers or working at a mill (18.1 per cent) followed by working in the drug trade (10.4 per cent).

### **Lifestyle Demographics**

In total, 376 files had information about the mental health history of the subject. Of these, nearly one-third (29.8 per cent) of subjects had a known history of mental illness. While not statistically significant, approximately one-fifth (18.9 per cent) of the Aboriginal subjects had a history of a mental illness compared to nearly one-third (31.0 per cent) of non-Aboriginals. Of those with a history of mental illness, nearly three-quarters (73.3 per cent) had been institutionalized at least once. Of those Aboriginal subjects who had a history of mental illness and institutionalisation information was available, all ( $n = 4$ ) had been previously institutionalized. By way of comparison, nearly three-quarters (71.8 per cent) of non-Aboriginal subjects had been previously institutionalised.

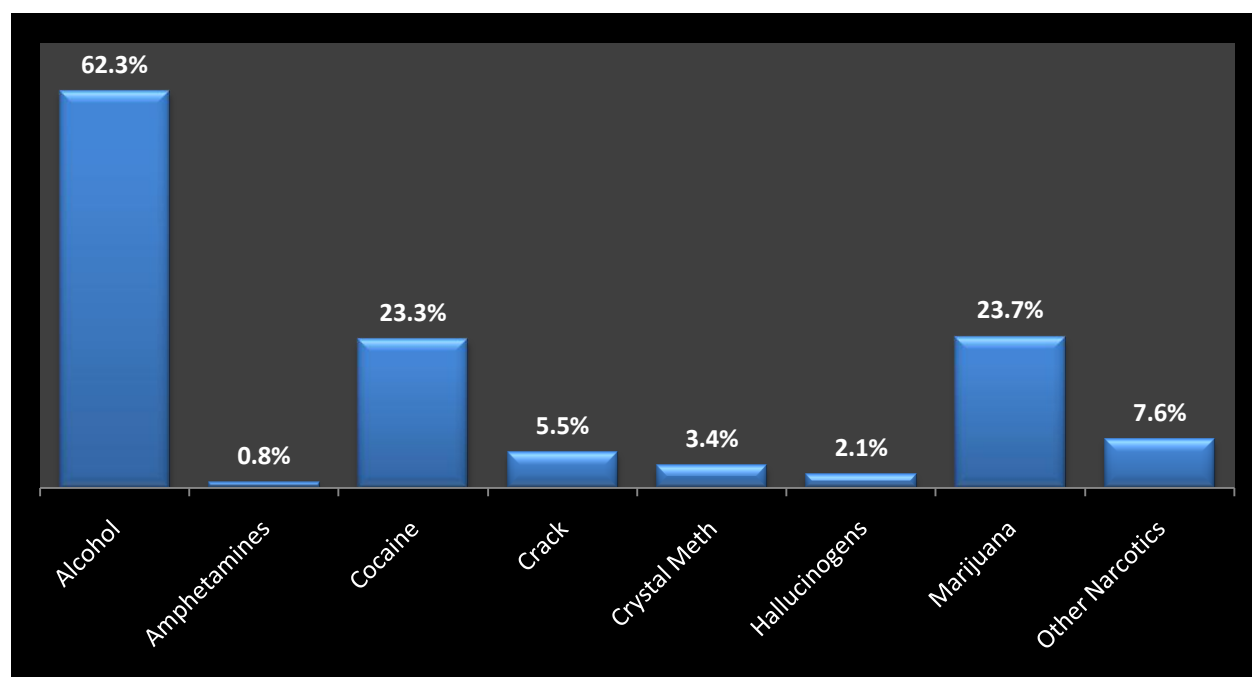
A small proportion of subjects (13.7 per cent) had previously attempted suicide. There was no statistically significant difference between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal subjects. Moreover, a very small proportion of subjects (16.0 per cent) were homeless or known to live on the streets. However, on this issue, there was a statistically significant difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal subjects. Specifically, while only 13.6% of non-

Aboriginal subjects were homeless or known to be living on the streets, nearly one-third (31.3 per cent) of Aboriginal subjects were homeless or known to be living on the streets.<sup>5</sup>

Of the 593 cases, drug-related information was available for 383 cases (64.6 per cent). Of these cases, nearly two-thirds (61.6 per cent) were identified as having an addiction or a substance abuse problem. While only a slight majority of non-Aboriginal subjects were known to have an addiction problem (56.8 per cent), more than four-fifths (83.8 per cent) of the Aboriginal subjects were known to have an addiction problem.<sup>6</sup> Most likely linked to the sex trade, it was interesting to note that nearly all of the females who were Aboriginal (86.8 per cent) and most of the non-Aboriginal females (71.4 per cent) were known to have addiction issues. By comparison, a similar proportion of Aboriginal males (80.0 per cent), but only half (49.5 per cent) of non-Aboriginal males had an addiction issue.

As demonstrated in Figure 5, the most common substance used was alcohol (62.3 per cent) followed by marijuana (23.7 per cent) and cocaine (23.3 per cent). Very few subjects were known to have used crack (5.5 per cent), crystal meth (3.4 per cent), or other narcotics (7.6 per cent).

Figure 5: Types of Substances Abused by Subjects



<sup>5</sup>  $\chi^2 (1) = 13.58, p = .000$

<sup>6</sup>  $\chi^2 (1) = 17.24, p = .000$

There were no statistically significant differences between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal subjects in terms of the types of drugs abused.

### Missing Person Investigations

Using the date that the missing person was last seen and the date that the person was reported missing to the police, there was a large difference between the number of days from the larger dataset (18.9 days;  $n = 1,202$ ) and the number of days just for those subjects ( $n = 545$ ) in which foul play could not be ruled out (296.8 days).<sup>7</sup> In effect, there was nearly a 14 fold increase in the amount of time that passed before a subject was reported missing to the police in cases where foul play had not been ruled out compared to cases where foul play had been ruled out.

Given the large range of elapsed time, it might be more helpful to recognise that, in cases where foul play had not been ruled out, nearly one-quarter of missing persons (23.9 per cent) were reported to the police within 24 hours of the person being last seen. Moreover, an additional 19.6% were reported to the police between 24 and 48 hours after they were last seen. In effect, nearly half of cases (43.5 per cent) were reported to the police within 48 hours. Still, one-quarter of cases were reported to the police 30 days or longer after the subject was last seen.

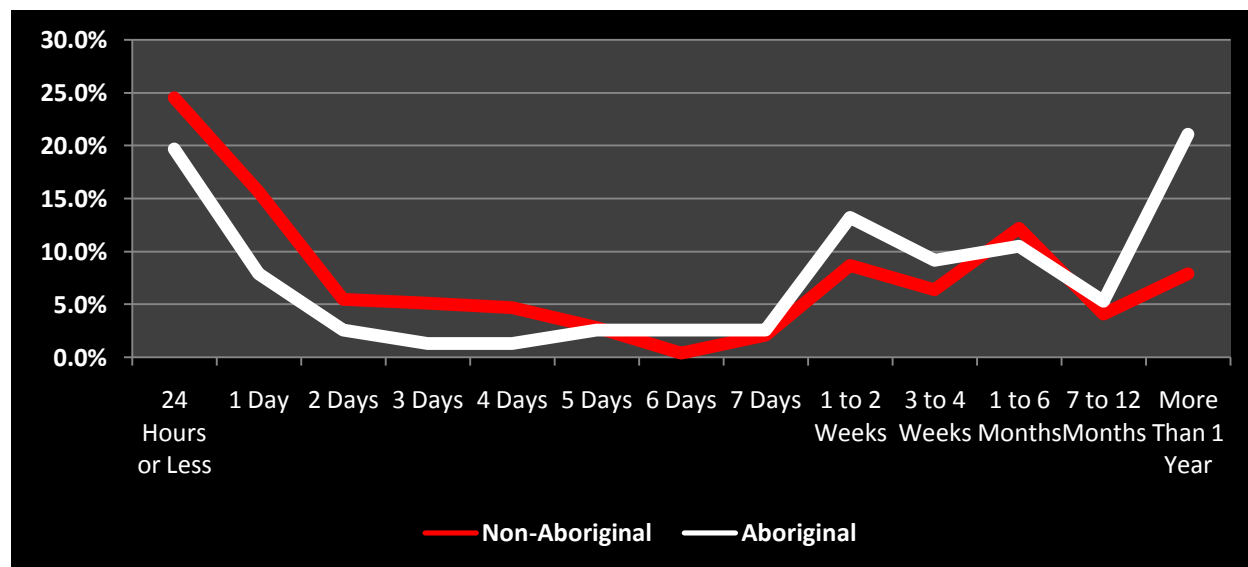
While not statistically significant, it was interesting to note that Aboriginal missing persons where foul play had not been ruled out were reported missing to the police, on average, 590.9 days after they were last seen compared to 249.1 days for their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Again, due to the large range in the elapsed amount of time between last being seen and being reported to the police as missing, it was helpful to consider several time blocks, such as within the first 48 hours. In this case, among the non-Aboriginals in the sample, nearly half (45.6 per cent) were reported missing within 48 hours compared to 30.2% of Aboriginals (see Figure 6). Moreover, while 75.8% of non-Aboriginals were reported missing to the police within 30 days, only 61.7% of Aboriginals were similarly reported missing within this time frame.

Of greater concern was the finding that, while only 7.9% of non-Aboriginals were reported missing one year or more from the date that they were last seen, slightly more than one-fifth (21.1 per cent) of Aboriginals were not reported missing for at least one year. One possible explanation for this finding, which will be explored in greater detail below, may be the different proportion of people working in the sex trade between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal samples.

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<sup>7</sup> Several cases were removed from this analysis as the files mistakenly indicated that the missing person was reported to police more than 90 years after they were last seen.

Figure 6: Distribution of the Number of Days between when a Person was Reported Missing to the Police and when they were Last Seen by Ethnicity

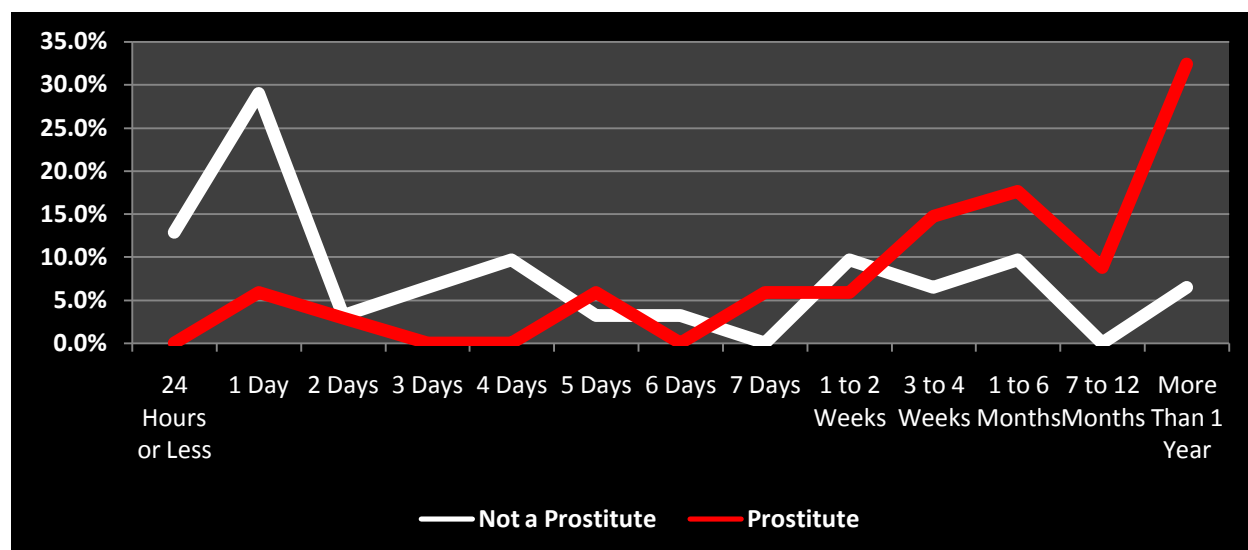


### Prostitution and Reporting Missing Person Cases

When one only considers the females in the sample<sup>8</sup>, while not statistically significant, there was a substantial difference in the amount of time it took for a person to be reported missing to the police based on whether they were a prostitute (see Figure 7). Specifically, prostitutes were reported missing, on average, 1,009.9 days (2.8 years) after they were last seen compared to 480.9 days (1.3 years) for those who were not prostitutes. Again, due to the large range in the elapsed amount of time between last being seen and being reported to the police as missing, it was instructive to consider several specific time blocks. In this case, for females who were not prostitutes, nearly half (45.1 per cent) were reported missing within 48 hours compared to only 8.8% of female prostitutes. Moreover, while 83.8% of non-prostitutes were reported missing to the police within 30 days, only 41.2% of prostitutes were similarly reported missing. More alarming, while 6.5% of the non-prostitutes were reported missing one year or more from their last known contact, nearly one-third (32.4 per cent) of prostitutes were not reported missing for at least one year.

<sup>8</sup> Only one male was identified as a prostitute in this sample.

Figure 7: Distribution of the Number of Days between When a Female was Reported Missing to the Police and their Last Contact by Whether the Subject was Identified as a Prostitute



While not statistically significant, when comparing Aboriginal female prostitutes to non-Aboriginal female prostitutes, it took substantially longer for the Aboriginals to be reported missing to the police. Specifically, Aboriginal female prostitutes were reported missing to the police, on average, 1,342.7 days (3.7 years) after they were last seen compared to 861.9 days (2.4 years) for their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

There were also minor differences depending on whether the female prostitute was Aboriginal for specific time frames. For example, none of the Aboriginal female prostitutes, where ethnicity was noted in the file, were reported missing within the first 24 hours. Moreover, 7.4% of the non-Aboriginal, but none of the Aboriginal prostitutes were reported missing between 24 and 48 hours after being last seen. In addition, nearly half (44.4 per cent) of the non-Aboriginal female prostitutes were reported missing to the police within 30 days of being last seen compared to 16.6% of the Aboriginal prostitutes.

### Last Person to See the Missing Person

Data on who was the last person to see the missing person in cases where foul play had not been ruled out was only available in a minority of cases (46.7 per cent). Most commonly, the last persons to see the missing person were a friend (36.5 per cent) or a family member (34.0 per cent), followed by an acquaintance (14.8 per cent). However, in many cases, it was someone other than the last person to see the missing person who reported the

individual as missing to the police.<sup>9</sup> In a majority of cases (60.4 per cent) a family member was the person who reported the missing person to the police, while a friend was the reporter in 12.9% of the cases. A person defined in the police file as a witness was the person who reported the individual as missing to the police in 15.8% of the cases. Co-workers and acquaintances were the people who notified the police in only a small proportion of the cases (4.3 per cent and 6.9 per cent, respectively). It would appear, therefore, that either the witness to an event or a family member growing concerned or suspicious accounted for slightly more than three-quarters (76.2 per cent) of the ways in which the police were made aware of the missing person.

Interestingly, there were no differences between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals for who was the last person to see the subject before they went missing. Similar to the general findings presented above, friends most commonly saw the missing person last (37.0 per cent for non-Aboriginals and 34.0 per cent for Aboriginals) followed by family (22.6 per cent for non-Aboriginals and 21.3 per cent for Aboriginals). However, there was one, albeit non-statistically significant difference, between these two groups with respect to who reported the subject missing. While a family member was still the most common source, they were the source for a slight minority (48.9 per cent) of non-Aboriginals, but a majority (61.7 per cent) among Aboriginal missing person's cases where foul play had not been ruled out.

In terms of whether the same category of person was both the last person to see the missing person and was the person who reported the subject missing to the police, in slightly more than one-quarter of the cases (28.0 per cent) in which a family member was the last person to see the missing individual, it was also a family member who reported the person missing to the police. Moreover, in 13.8% of the cases, it was a friend who last saw the missing person and reported them missing. In effect, it was generally unlikely that the last person to see the missing person before they went missing was also the individual who reported the subject as missing to the police.

As this sample was comprised of missing persons where foul play had not been ruled out, it was not unexpected that only very few cases (4.4 per cent) indicated that the missing person left a note. In none of the cases in this sample was a risk assessment done by the police to establish the risk level of the missing person.

### **Probable Cause Designation**

Although all of the cases in this sample had not ruled out foul play as playing a role in the missing person case, there are many different ways in which an individual could go missing. Police classified all missing person cases into eight possible probable causes. As

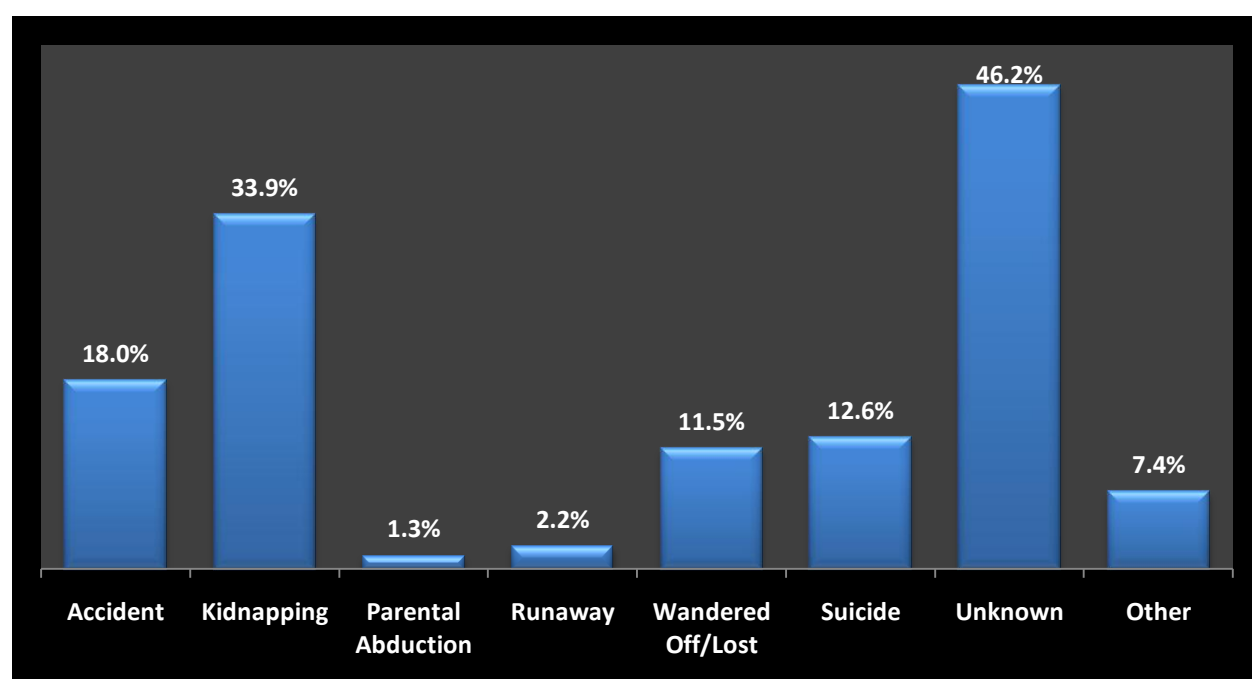
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<sup>9</sup> The data for this piece of information was much more complete as 89.9% of files had information about who reported the missing person to the police.



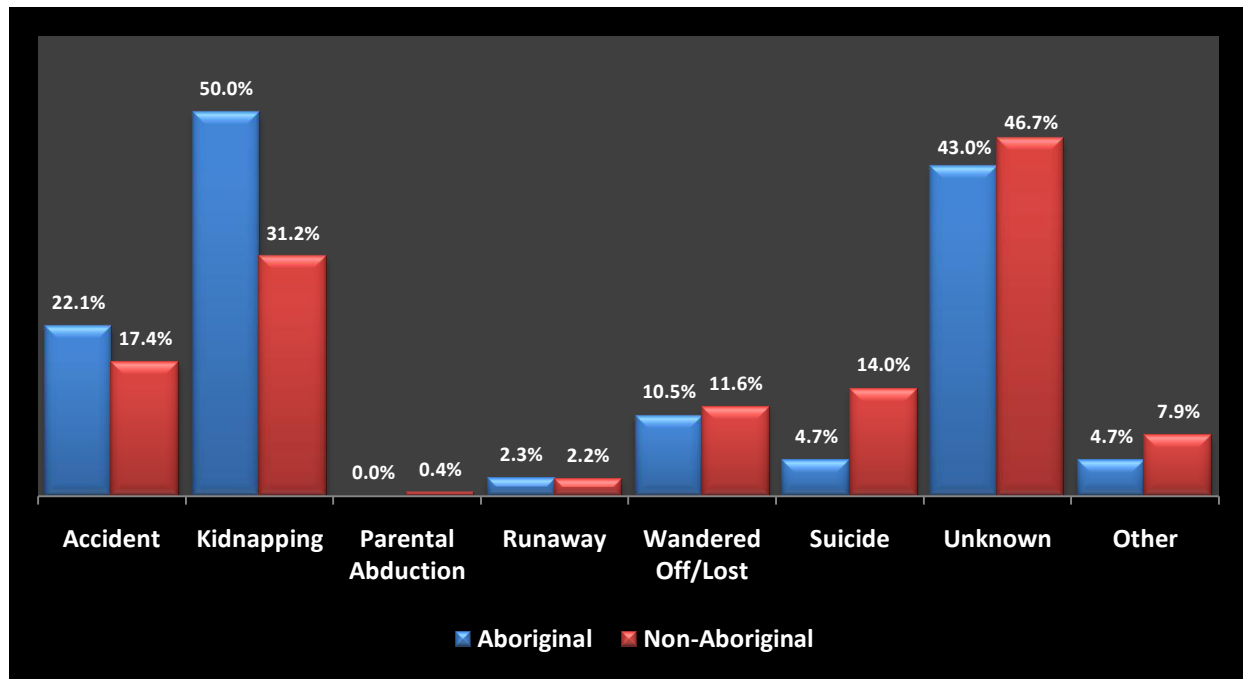
the police could select more than one probable cause, the 593 cases combined for a total of 790 probable causes. As demonstrated in Figure 8, in a near majority of cases (46.2 per cent), the probable cause of the disappearance was unknown to the police. In one-third of cases, the probable cause was a kidnapping. In less than one-fifth of cases, the probable causes were an accident (18.0 per cent), suicide (12.6 per cent), and wandering off or getting lost (11.5 per cent). Very few cases had a probable cause of running away (2.2 per cent) or parental abduction (1.3 per cent). Given the mean age of the sample, it was also not unexpected that there would be a small proportion of cases classified or considered by the police to be either parental abductions or runaways.

Figure 8: Probable Causes of the Uncleared Missing Person Cases in which Foul Play had not been Ruled Out



There were two differences of note when comparing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal missing person cases where foul play had not been ruled out (see Figure 9). Specifically, while half of all Aboriginal cases were classified as a probable kidnapping, there was a much smaller proportion for the non-Aboriginals in this sample (31.2 per cent). Conversely, while both proportions are relatively small, 14.0% of the non-Aboriginals compared to just 4.7% of Aboriginals were classified by police as likely suicides. In terms of raw numbers, this amounts to 71 non-Aboriginal subjects compared to just four Aboriginal missing persons.

Figure 9: Probable Causes of the Uncleared Missing Person Cases in which Foul Play had not been Ruled Out by Ethnicity



Also of note, when considering whether the subject was a prostitute by ethnicity, the most common probable causes for their disappearance among non-Aboriginal prostitutes was an unknown situation (91.7 per cent) and kidnapping (13.9 per cent). However, among Aboriginal prostitutes, while these two probable causes were also the two most common, the proportions were substantially different. Specifically, slightly less than three-quarters of the cases (73.3 per cent) were classified as an unknown situation and 40.0% were considered to be the result of a kidnapping.

There were some substantial differences in the amount of time between the subject last being seen and the police being notified of the missing person by the probable cause classification of the case. As indicated by Table 1, the types of cases that were reported to the police with the mean shortest elapsed time were missing person cases involving runaways (33.3 days) and suicides (36.4 days). Conversely, cases in which the probable cause remained unknown (462.8 days), kidnapping (350.2 days), and cases where the subject wandered off or was lost (105.8 days) had the largest mean elapsed time. While longer mean elapsed time might be understandable for some kinds of accident cases, cases where the probable cause was unclear or unknown to the police, or suicide cases, it is

unknown why there was such a long elapsed time for cases involving a kidnapping or a parental abduction.

Table 1: Probable Causes by the Number of Days before Person was Reported Missing

PROBABLE CAUSE	Mean Number of Days	Mean Number of Days Aboriginal Subjects	Mean Number of Days Non-Aboriginal Subjects
Accident	48.9	187.7	17.9
Kidnapping	350.2	563.2	227.0
Parental Abduction	51.0	-	51.0
Runaway	33.3	174.5	7.6
Wandered Off	105.8	6.3	121.8
Suicide	36.4	114.3	31.7
Unknown	462.8	886.0	404.4

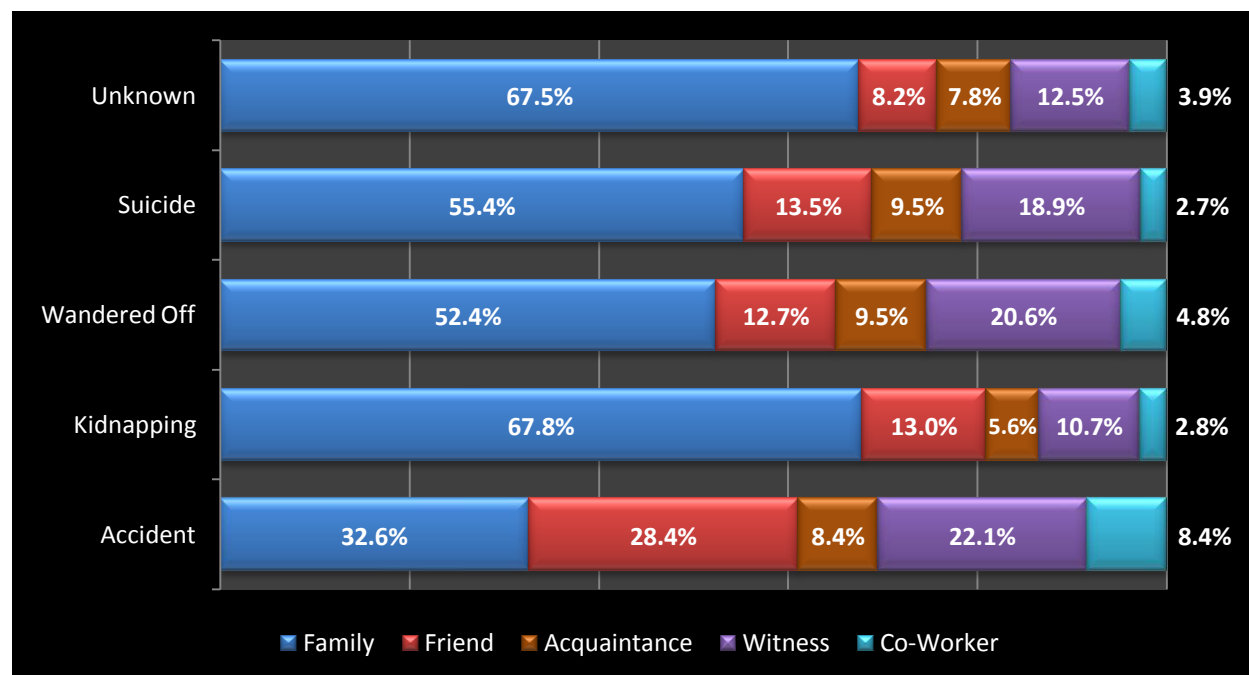
In considering the differences between the Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals in this sample, it was striking that in all cases, with the exception of the person wandering off or considered lost, substantially more time elapsed before an Aboriginal person was reported missing compared to their non-Aboriginal counterparts (see Table 1). While this finding could be explained, in part, by the small number of Aboriginals in some of these categories and, therefore, the effect of one or two cases with extremely large elapsed time values, it is still important to recognize that, with the exception of accidents, the elapsed time between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals was typically 2 to 4 times longer.<sup>10</sup> It may also be that involvement in the sex trade was a partial explanation for these large differences.

With respect to who contacted the police based on the probable cause of the missing person cases, for all types of missing person cases, it was a family member who most commonly contacted the police. For example, when the case was considered to be an accident, in approximately one-third of cases (32.6 per cent), it was a family member of the missing person who reported them missing to the police (see Figure 10). This was likely due to who was present at the time of the accident. When the probable cause was a kidnapping, the person who reported the subject missing to the police was typically a family member (67.8 per cent each), and in a majority of cases in which the probable cause was either a suicide (55.4 per cent) or the subject wandered off or got lost (52.4 per cent), it was also a family member who contacted the police. In effect, the consistent finding throughout this analysis was that the police were notified about a missing person from family members, then friends or a witness, followed by an acquaintance and then a co-

<sup>10</sup> For accidents, the difference is nearly 8 fold.

worker. This pattern held when considering any differences between the Aboriginals and the non-Aboriginals in this sample.

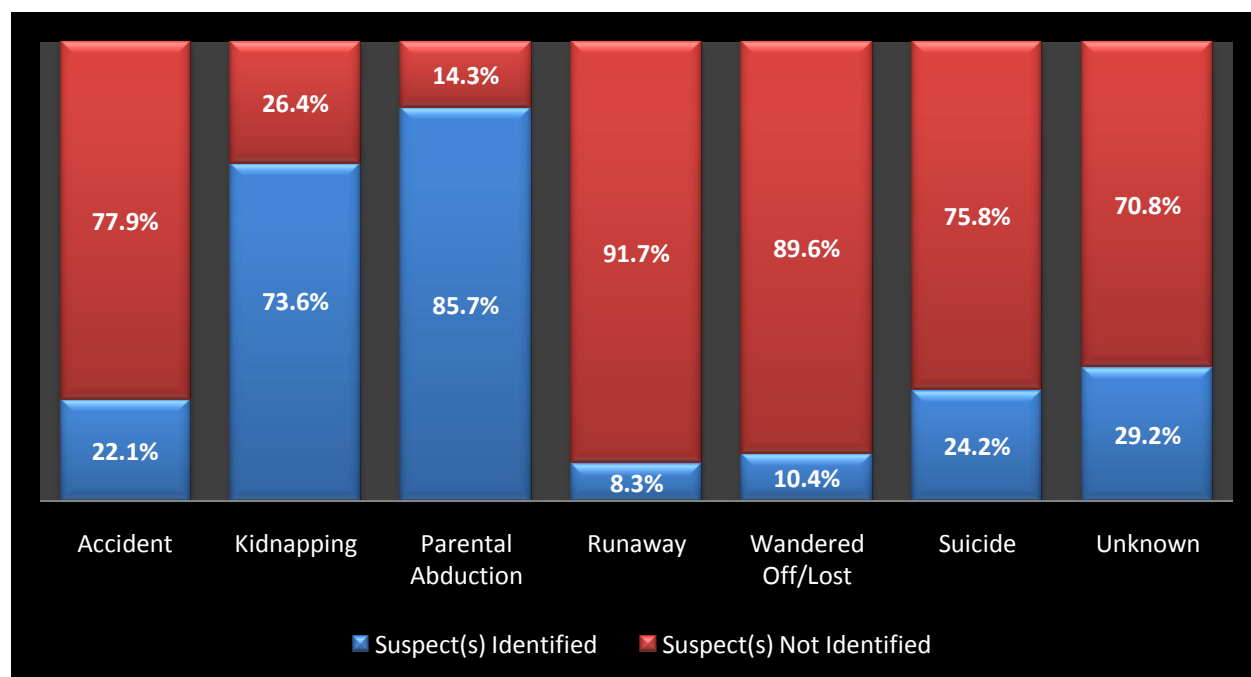
Figure 10: Probable Cause by Who Reported the Subject Missing to the Police<sup>11</sup>



In nearly three-quarters (73.5 per cent) of cases, information was available about whether any suspects had been identified. In slightly more than one-third of these cases (37.8 per cent), at least one suspect had been identified. While there was no information about the characteristics of the suspects or their relationship to the missing person recorded in the police files, there was a predictable pattern with respect to the probable causes of the missing person case and whether a suspect was identified for cases where foul play had not been ruled out. For the most part, in cases of kidnapping (73.6 per cent) or parental abduction (85.7 per cent), the police were able to identify at least one suspect (see Figure 11). However, when the probable cause was unknown or an accident, police only identified a suspect in approximately one-quarter of cases (29.2 per cent and 22.1 per cent, respectively). Moreover, in cases where the probable cause was a runaway or the subject was deemed to have wandered off, it was rare for the police to identify a suspect (8.3 per cent and 10.4 per cent, respectively).

<sup>11</sup> Parental abductions and runaways were not included in this analysis because of the low number of subjects in these categories.

Figure 11: Proportion of Cases in Which a Suspect was Identified by Probable Cause for Cases Where Foul Play was Not Ruled Out



There was a statistically significant difference in whether any suspects had been identified between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in this sample. Specifically, in approximately two-thirds (63.5 per cent) of cases involving an Aboriginal missing person, police had identified a suspect compared to one-third of the cases (34.4 per cent) where the missing person was non-Aboriginal.<sup>12</sup> There was a non-statistically significant, but interesting, finding when considering whether the subject was a prostitute. For non-Aboriginals, a suspect was identified in three-quarters of the cases where the subject was a prostitute, but in only a minority of cases (42.1 per cent) in which the subject was not a prostitute. Conversely, when the subject was Aboriginal and a prostitute, in only 40% of these cases the police identified a suspect compared to 72.7% of Aboriginal subjects who were not prostitutes. In effect, suspects were most commonly identified in cases involving Aboriginal missing persons; however, this was not the case if the Aboriginal missing person was involved in the sex trade.

### Repeat Missing Persons

In this sample, 13.7% of missing persons were identified as having been previously missing (n = 59). There was a non-statistically significant difference between Aboriginal and non-

<sup>12</sup>  $\chi^2 (1) = 16.47, p = .000$

Aboriginal missing persons as approximately one-quarter (24.5 per cent) of Aboriginal missing persons were repeat missing persons compared to 12.1% within the non-Aboriginal sample. As an aside, slightly more than one-third (35.7 per cent) of the repeat missing persons were known to work in the sex trade.<sup>13</sup> This finding should not be unexpected given that 40.7% of repeat missing persons were female and that, as mentioned above, a majority of females were known to be prostitutes.<sup>14</sup>

## Investigation Status

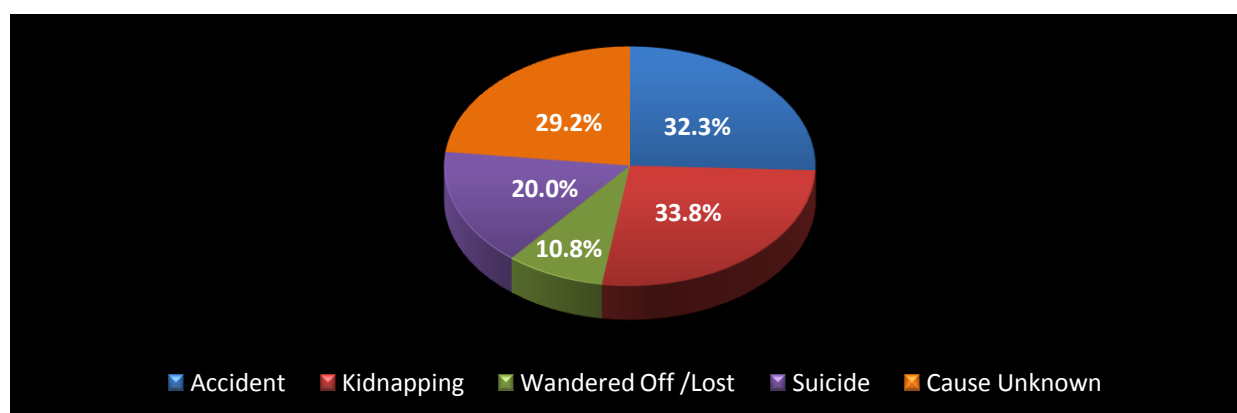
This section will examine a number of issues related to the investigation of missing persons where foul play had not been ruled out.

### Being Declared Dead

In slightly more than one-fifth of the cases (21.4 per cent), the missing person had been declared deceased by the courts. There was no difference by gender or ethnicity on whether the courts had declared a missing person dead. Of those cases with information on the date when the person went missing and the date that they were declared deceased by the courts ( $n = 49$ ), the mean amount of time elapsed was 51 months or 4.2 years. While not statistically significant, it took longer for Aboriginal missing persons to be declared dead by the courts ( $5\frac{3}{4}$  years) compared to their non-Aboriginal counterparts (4 years).

One possible explanation for this finding might be the probable causes associated with these missing persons. The most common probable cause among those declared dead was a kidnapping (33.8 per cent), closely followed by an accident (32.3 per cent), and the probable cause being unknown to the police (29.2 per cent). None of the missing persons who were declared dead by the courts were thought to be missing as a result of a parental abduction or because the subject ran away (see Figure 12).

Figure 12: Probable Cause of Missing Persons Declared Dead by the Courts ( $n = 65$ )

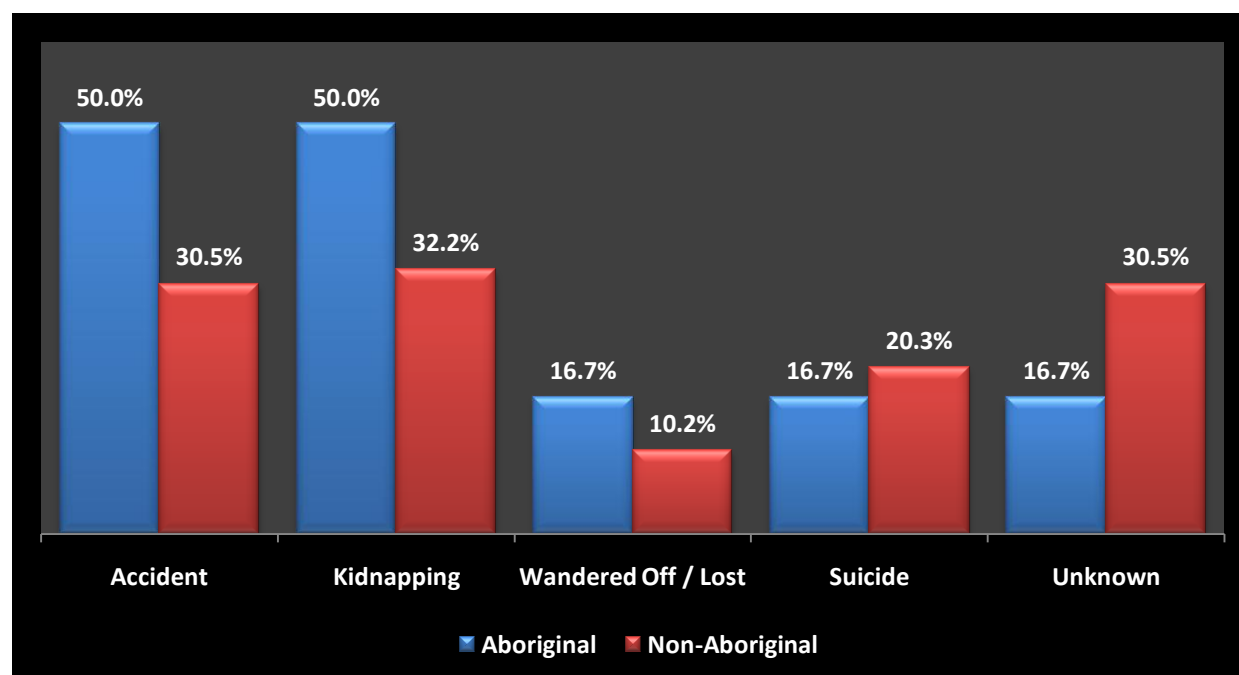


<sup>13</sup>  $\chi^2 (1) = 9.88, p = .002$

<sup>14</sup>  $\chi^2 (1) = 9.29, p = .002$

While there were some slight variations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal missing persons in terms of probable cause and being declared dead by the courts, for the most part, the main probable causes held for both samples (see Figure 13). In other words, for both groups, accidents and kidnappings were the most common probable causes. The one main difference was in cases where the probable cause remained unknown to the police. In these cases, nearly twice the proportion of non-Aboriginals (30.5 per cent) was declared dead by the courts compared to their Aboriginal counterparts (16.7 per cent).

Figure 13: Probable Cause of Missing Persons Declared Dead by the Courts by Ethnicity



In considering the elapsed time between a person going missing and being declared dead by the courts by probable cause, some interesting differences existed (see Table 2). For example, in cases where the probable cause was unknown to the police, on average, those who were declared dead ( $n = 13$ ) were so declared  $6\frac{1}{2}$  years after being reported missing. By contrast, those who were missing as a result of an accident and declared dead were so declared approximately  $1\frac{1}{2}$  years after being reported missing. The fact that the unknown cause cases took so much longer to declare the missing person dead compared to cases believed to be an accident seems logical. Other reasonable findings involved subjects who were believed to have wandered off or gotten lost. In these cases, the courts waited, on average,  $2\frac{3}{4}$  years before declaring the subject dead. This result makes sense as the courts would want to make sure that the person was, in fact, dead and would not be found or return on their own volition. However, it was puzzling why the courts waited, on average,

5.4 years to declare a missing person dead when the police believed that the subject likely committed suicide ( $n = 10$ ).

Table 2: Mean Amount of Time in Months between a Person Going Missing and Being Declared Dead by the Probable Cause of the Disappearance

	Mean Elapsed Time in Months	Mean Elapsed Time in Months Aboriginal Subjects	Mean Elapsed Time in Months Non-Aboriginal Subjects
Accident	17.8	26.5	15.2
Kidnapping	55.0	8.0	65.9
Wandered Off/Lost	34.4	14.0	39.5
Suicide	65.8	12.0	71.8
Cause Unknown	79.5	304.0	60.8

There were substantial differences in the mean elapsed time until a missing person was declared dead by the courts considering the probable cause of the disappearance by ethnicity. However, there were no clear patterns for whether Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal missing persons took longer to be declared dead (see Table 2). Perhaps again related to the sex trade, it took approximately five times longer for Aboriginal missing persons where the probable cause was unknown to the police to be declared dead compared to their non-Aboriginal counterparts. However, when the probable cause was kidnapping, it took nearly eight times the amount of time for non-Aboriginals to be declared dead than Aboriginals.<sup>15</sup>

### Police Practice and Procedures

There are a number of standard procedures that police follow in the course of a missing person's investigation. Based on the information available in the files, for this sample, it was not uncommon for a bank check to be conducted (47.8 per cent). However, it was less common for credit card or debit card use (31.8 per cent), welfare activity (35.5 per cent), or a Human Resources and Development Canada (HRDC) check (39.8 per cent) to be conducted. In very few cases, post office activity (5.9 per cent), tax submissions (3.8 per cent), or email account activity (4.2 per cent) were checked (see Table 3).

There were some interesting variations on the type of checks conducted on these missing persons by ethnicity (see Table 3). For example, there was a statistically significant difference on whether bank accounts were checked. While a majority of non-Aboriginals in this sample (51.1 per cent) had a bank check conducted, only one-quarter of Aboriginals (24.0 per cent) had a similar check conducted.<sup>16</sup> While not statistically significant, it was unexpected that there would be a two fold increase in the proportion of non-Aboriginals

<sup>15</sup> In considering this data, it is important to note that many of these probable causes had very few subjects.

<sup>16</sup>  $\chi^2 (1) = 12.92, p = .000$



who had credit card or debit card use checked (34.2 per cent) compared to their Aboriginal counterparts (14.6 per cent). Again, lifestyle issues may have played a role in the finding that a greater proportion of Aboriginals (42.3 per cent) compared to non-Aboriginals (34.5 per cent) had welfare activity checks. Finally, on whether post office, tax, and email activity checks were conducted, there were very minor, non-statistically significant, differences between the two groups.

Table 3: Types of Checks Conducted by Ethnicity

	Total Sample	Aboriginal Sample	Non-Aboriginal Sample
Bank	47.8%	24.0%	51.1%
Credit/Debit Card	31.8%	14.6%	34.2%
Welfare	35.5%	42.3%	34.5%
HRDC	39.8%	37.3%	40.2%
Post Office	5.9%	6.1%	5.8%
Tax	10.0%	8.3%	10.2%
Email	4.2%	2.3%	4.5%

Of note, there was a general pattern by district. In effect, the Lower Mainland district always conducted a greater proportion of checks than any of the other districts. Checks were next most common in the Southeast district (see Table 4). For example, while all districts conducted bank activity checks on at least one-third of missing persons in their district where foul play had not been ruled out, nearly half of all cases in the Lower Mainland also had credit card or debit card activity checks, welfare activity checks, and an HRDC check. Regardless of district, very few post office, tax, and email activity checks were conducted with this sample.

Table 4: Types of Checks by District

	Lower Mainland	Island	North	Southeast
Bank	56.9%	38.3%	35.9%	43.5%
Credit/Debit Card	40.8%	23.4%	19.1%	30.2%
Welfare	41.7%	20.8%	27.5%	39.1%
HRDC	45.5%	26.5%	30.5%	46.9%
Post Office	6.2%	0	4.4%	11.9%
Tax	11.9%	8.2%	6.7%	11.1%
Email	6.6%	0	1.2%	4.1%

In terms of other kinds of data that the police might have that would either help them locate a missing person or identify the body of a missing person, nearly three-quarters of

missing persons (72.5 per cent) had their photographs on file with the police. While the police had the fingerprints of less than one-quarter (22.1 per cent) of missing persons, they had the dental records for a majority (58.9 per cent) of the sample. Moreover, while the police had the birth certificate of one-third of the sample, they had DNA exhibits from very few (6.2 per cent). There were virtually no differences on these records by ethnicity.<sup>17</sup>

In nearly half of the cases (45.9 per cent), ground and/or air searches were conducted to assist in the search for the missing person. There was no difference based on ethnicity, but there was a statistically significant difference based on gender as half of the male missing persons (51.0 per cent), but slightly less than one-third (30.5 per cent) of females had a ground and/or air search conducted to find them.<sup>18</sup> It appears that this may be related to working in the sex trade as only 11.5% of those who were known to be a prostitute had a ground and/or air search conducted compared to 45.6% of those who were not prostitutes.<sup>19</sup> It was most common for a search to be conducted on missing person cases believed to be the result of an accident (87.8 per cent) or where the person was believed to have wandered off or gotten lost (63.8 per cent). Least common was when the cause of the missing person was unknown to the police (24.4 per cent) (see Table 5).

The mean amount of time that a search lasted was 9.5 days.<sup>20</sup> It is interesting to note that when the subject was Aboriginal, the search lasted, on average, 18.9 days compared to 7.7 days for a non-Aboriginal subject. Again, this might be explained by the facts that when the subject was female, the search lasted, on average twice as long (17.0 days) than when the subject was male (8.0), and, if the subject was a prostitute, the average search was for 2.5 days compared to 11.1 days for non-prostitutes.

Table 5: Distribution of Whether a Search was Conducted Based on Probable Cause and Ethnicity

PROBABLE CAUSE	Total Sample	Aboriginal Sample	Non-Aboriginal Sample
Accident	87.8%	88.2%	87.7%
Kidnapping	38.8%	54.3%	35.0%
Wandered Off/Lost	63.8%	87.5%	60.0%
Suicide	46.7%	75.0%	45.1%
Unknown	24.4%	14.8%	25.8%

Also demonstrated in Table 5, it would appear that there were some slight variations in whether a search was conducted based on the probable cause of the disappearance and the

<sup>17</sup> Of note, of the 30 missing persons with DNA exhibits in police records, none of them were Aboriginal.

<sup>18</sup>  $\chi^2 (1) = 16.01, p = .000$

<sup>19</sup>  $\chi^2 (1) = 10.82, p = .001$

<sup>20</sup> This result was based on 176 cases. Several cases could not be included in this analysis because terms were used, such as 'extensive' or 'for more than one year', to describe how long the search continued.

ethnicity of the missing person. For example, while the large majority of both Aboriginals (88.2 per cent) and non-Aboriginals (87.7 per cent) had a search conducted for them when the probable cause of their disappearance was an accident, only slightly more than one-third (35.0 per cent) of non-Aboriginals compared to a majority of Aboriginals (54.3 per cent) had a search conducted for them when the probable cause was a kidnapping. Moreover, while 60% of non-Aboriginals had a search conducted for them when the probable cause was wandering off or being lost, nearly all of their Aboriginal counterparts (87.5 per cent) were searched for. In addition, when the probable cause was suicide, a minority of non-Aboriginals (45.1 per cent), but three-quarters of Aboriginals were searched for. Interestingly, when the cause of the missing person was unknown, there were very low proportions of subjects who were searched for. Specifically, only one-quarter (25.8 per cent) of non-Aboriginals and 14.8% of Aboriginals were searched for. In effect, with the exception of cases where the probable cause was unknown, a greater proportion of Aboriginal missing persons compared to non-Aboriginals had a ground and/or air search conducted to locate them.

There were no substantial differences in the mean number of days that searches were conducted by on the probable cause of the missing person or their ethnicity. As might be expected, searches were maintained longer when the missing person was thought to be either lost or wandered off or kidnapped. It should also be noted that the one large difference found between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals (wandered off/lost) may be explained by the sample size. Specifically, while the average for non-Aboriginals was based on 24 cases with a standard deviation of 5.45, there were only seven Aboriginal cases with a standard deviation of 135.60.<sup>21</sup>

Table 6: Mean Number of Days that the Search was Maintained Based on Probable Cause and Ethnicity

PROBABLE CAUSE	Total Sample	Aboriginal Sample	Non-Aboriginal Sample
Accident	4.7 days	4.3 days	4.7 days
Kidnapping	18.7 days	28.8 days	14.8 days
Wandered Off/Lost	18.4 days	57.6 days	7.0 days
Suicide	4.1 days	2.5 days	4.2 days
Unknown	4.4 days	4.0 days	4.4 days

In those cases where an air and/or ground search was conducted (n = 227), helicopters were used nearly two-thirds of the time (64.2 per cent). A similar proportion was found for the use of police boats or Coast Guard boats (62.4 per cent). Airplanes were used in a slight minority of cases (47.9 per cent), but, in the majority of cases where a search was

<sup>21</sup> In addition, the standard error for the mean for the non-Aboriginals in the sample was 1.113 compared to 51.253 for the Aboriginal sample.

conducted, police dog services were used (56.5 per cent). As expected, in three-quarters of cases where a search was conducted, police search and rescue was used. While the use of these resources was slightly more common when the missing person was non-Aboriginal, the differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal missing persons were not statistically significant.

Given all the resources deployed, and the amount of time that searches were maintained, only slightly more than one-fifth of searches (22.9 per cent) were successful in finding any evidence, such as clothing belonging to the missing person. While not statistically significant, evidence was found in nearly one-quarter (24.7 per cent) of cases when the missing person was non-Aboriginal, but in only 12.1% of cases when the missing person was Aboriginal.

Searches were most successful when the probable cause of the missing person was an accident (49.0 per cent), followed by a kidnapping (29.4 per cent), and when the probable cause was unknown (29.4 per cent). In very few cases did the search find any evidence when the missing person was believed to have wandered off or gotten lost (11.8 per cent) or thought to have committed suicide (9.8 per cent). While the number of subjects was very small ( $n = 12$ ), in one-quarter of the cases where the probable cause of the missing person was kidnapping and the subject was non-Aboriginal did the search uncover any evidence. However, when the subject was Aboriginal ( $n = 4$ ), three of the four searches uncovered evidence.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, in very few of the non-Aboriginal cases where the missing person was believed to have wandered off or gotten lost did the search find any evidence (8.5 per cent); however, when the subject was Aboriginal ( $n = 4$ ), two of the searches uncovered some evidence. Conversely, none of the searches when the probable cause was unknown and the missing person was Aboriginal uncovered any evidence, compared to nearly one-third (31.9 per cent) of similar cases where the missing person was not Aboriginal.

For the most part, the police files indicated that there had not been any sighting tips since the initial investigation for the missing persons (83.2 per cent). However, there was a statistically significant difference between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals on this issue as there were no tips for the large majority of non-Aboriginals (85.2 per cent) compared to slightly more than two-thirds of Aboriginals (71.0 per cent).<sup>23</sup> As expected, in the large majority of cases (85.0 per cent), remains or belongings of the missing person had not been recovered. And, in a minority of cases (41.1 per cent), checks had been made with the Coroner Service for matching remains. There were no significant differences between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals on these last two issues.

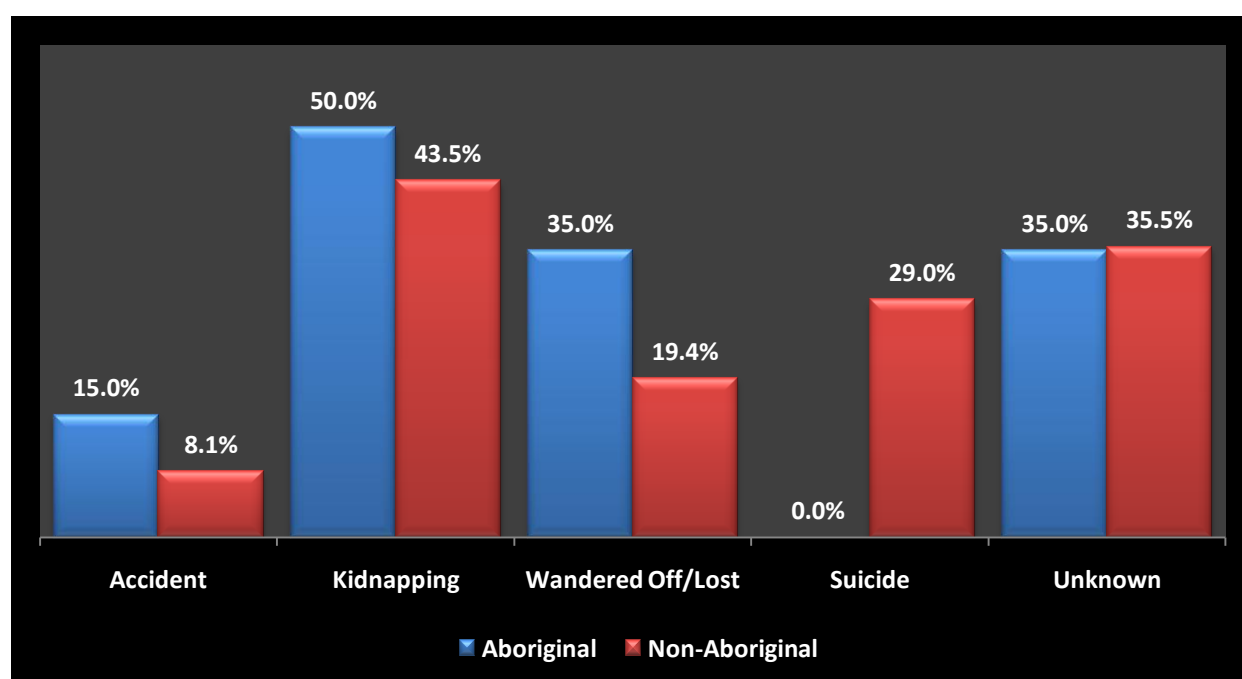
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<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, this resulted in an equal number of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cases ( $n = 3$ ) where a search was conducted in relation to a missing person's case of kidnapping and some evidence was recovered.

<sup>23</sup>  $\chi^2 (1) = 8.52, p = .003$

In considering only those missing person cases that generated a sighting tip since the initial investigation by probable cause and ethnicity, there were some interesting, albeit non-statistically significant, findings (see Figure 14). For almost of probable causes, tips were more common for Aboriginal missing persons. Still, the most common probable cause that resulted in sighting tips were cases of kidnapping, cases where the probable cause was unknown, and cases where the missing person was believed to have wandered off or gotten lost. There is no logical explanation for the fact that there was nearly double the proportion of cases where there was a sighting tip for non-Aboriginal missing persons related to having wandered off or gotten lost.<sup>24</sup>

Figure 14: Probable Cause by Ethnicity for Cases Where There had been a Sighting Tip



## Conclusion

The intent of the current study was to provide a descriptive analysis of uncleared missing person cases in British Columbia where foul play had not been ruled out and to examine differences in these cases between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal subjects. From the review of these cases, several important findings emerged. The majority of non-Aboriginal females and slightly more than three-quarters of Aboriginal females were working as

<sup>24</sup> There is no explanation for the fact that 18 non-Aboriginal missing persons in which the probable cause for their disappearance was suicide had sighting tips since the initial investigation.

prostitutes at the time of their disappearance. In fact, more than half of the females in this sample were prostitutes. The Aboriginals in this sample were more likely to be homeless or known to be living on the streets and were much more likely to have an addiction problem.

The Aboriginal missing persons in this sample were reported missing to the police after more than twice as much time had elapsed compared to non-Aboriginals. Aboriginal female prostitutes had the largest elapsed time between when they were last seen and when they were reported missing to the police. Alarming, the average amount of elapsed time was approximately 3½ years for Aboriginal female prostitutes. In effect, substantially more time elapsed before an Aboriginal person was reported missing compared to non-Aboriginals.

The most common probable cause of the missing person cases among Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals was a kidnapping; however, Aboriginals were much more likely to have this probable cause than non-Aboriginals. Perhaps because of this, cases involving an Aboriginal missing person were more likely to have an identified suspect, unless the subject was a prostitute.

As indicated throughout this report, many of the files had a substantial amount of missing data. One of the main benefits of this report is that it can be useful in providing additional credence for the need to create a uniform database to be utilized in all police jurisdictions across Canada. In order to ensure a missing person database is useful at a national level, it must be built on information directly related to missing person cases. The results of this study indicated that there were several areas in which additional information should be recorded by the police, such as the sexual orientation of the missing person.

Finally, Aboriginal people were overrepresented in this sample of missing persons where foul play had not been ruled out. Moreover, there were several important differences on a range of issues between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in this sample. However, it is critical to keep in mind that many of these differences were not related to the actions of the police. In effect, if one considers the general lifestyles of many of these missing persons and, most importantly for clearing missing person cases, the elapsed amount of time before the missing person was reported to the police and the probable cause for the disappearance, it would appear that police attention to these cases or the investigative procedures and actions that the police took to find the missing person were not negatively affected by whether the missing person was Aboriginal or not. For example, as mentioned above, searches for missing persons continued for longer, on average, when the missing person was Aboriginal and a greater proportion of Aboriginal missing persons had a ground and/or air search conducted to locate them.

Given this, it would appear that the greatest contributions to Aboriginal missing person cases where foul play had not been ruled out and the case had not been cleared was the elapsed time before the missing person was reported missing to the police, the probable

cause of the disappearance, and the missing person's lifestyle, especially working in the sex trade. This suggests that the public must be more vigilant in reporting missing persons to the police promptly, and the police need to develop better contacts and knowledge of with those working in the sex trade workers so that, if a sex trade worker disappears in a situation where foul play cannot be ruled out are not simply missed, but the police are notified.